

# The Clipper Visits Howard Goding

by Judy Foley

Howard Goding, concert pianist and retired music professor, quietly announced he will not play in public again.



Howard Goding

Goding, approaching his 87th birthday next week, has glaucoma, and he says his sight has rapidly deteriorated since last fall.

The announcement came without fanfare. He was sitting next to a small fire in his living room, reminiscing about his long life in music. Now plagued by dimming eyesight, he casually remarked that a recent concert at the Duxbury Art Complex will be his last.

"I don't see well enough anymore," he said solemnly, watching his frail fingers trace an imaginary keyboard. "I still play, but I will not play public recitals again."

There is no bitterness in his voice. "I've played so many times and places, I'm quite content."

Goding is a keen, meticulous man with a quick wit and penetrating eyes. He lives alone, with only part-time help to manage the house and cooking. Before settling down to his easy chair, he donned a heavy black overcoat and cap, a d gloves "to still protect the piano hands," and went to the garage for wood for the fire, counting the steps into the house as he returned.

His last concert, to a capacity crowd at the Art Complex last November, celebrated the 75th anniversary of his first solo recital in 1904, at age 11. Goding can't recall what he played on that first recital, but 2 years later he performed "Hayden's D Major Sonata" during graduation from a Dedham elementary school.

His schoolday concerts began a long love affair with music that still burns strongly in the gentle, white-haired pianist.

He started high school at an early age, so his parents stopped the music lessons that started when he was 8. "But on my own, I kept reading stacks and stacks of music books. I was fascinated by the art of music, so I carried on, practiced, and taught myself to play the organ."

In 1910, he entered the New England Conservatory of Music as an organ major. "When I was young, I was fascinated by the organ. You know, it made a lot of noise and I was impressed with that."

He gradually realized that the piano was more important to him, but admits he was glad he studied the organ. "I got a lot of church positions, and earned money while I studied," he said, eyes twinkling in the boyish style of old men.

He graduated in 1913 as an organist and continued studying piano until 1915, when he won top honors at a Mason & Hamlin competition and received a piano from the company. The same piano sits in his living room today, he proudly pointed out.

Two years later, at 24, he made his debut as a soloist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, under conductor Dr. Carl Muck.

His career was interrupted in 1918 by a year in the Army Field Signal Corps toward the end of World War I. "Few men went abroad that year," he said. "The only action I had was being frozen to death in Burlington, Vermont."

He made his formal debut recital at Jordan Hall in 1919, and accepted a faculty post at the Conservatory as a junior staff member. By 1936, he was chairman of the piano department, a seat he held until his retirement in 1972.

Last June, the Conservatory gave Goding its outstanding Alumnus Award, for his graduations in both organ and piano and his long years on the

faculty.

"I taught music for 50 years steady," he said. "It was wonderful to enjoy something and be able to do it for so long." He taught only piano and only to one student at a time, developing "delightful personal relationships with each one."

"The young have so many more opportunities today. In my youth, we never even had the number of recordings available today. Now there is an enormous amount of talent, and a standard of accomplishment far greater than I ever dreamed of."

He leaned back with a subtle shrug. "Perhaps things were a little gentler before. People had time enough to enjoy and patronize the arts. There wasn't always a constant drive. But then again, maybe every generation feels that way."

Over the years, Goding performed recitals with the BSO, the Boston Pops and across the country in New York, Chicago, Seattle, Portland, and once, Juneau, Alaska. He played and taught as visiting pianist-in-residence at the University of Idaho for 8 summer courses.

He also played chamber music and ensemble, and traveled through New England with other players during the 20's and 30's. "It was an easier time to get around," he recalled. "Train service was better until the 40's."

Goding lived with his family in Dedham until he was in his 50's, then in Boston, until he retired to the Duxbury home where he spent summers since 1950. He never married, he said, being "too involved in everything else."

He's comfortable in Duxbury, he said. His house is close to the ocean and far enough away from Washington St. "to avoid the noise of the traffic." He was forced to sell his car recently because of the glaucoma, but is fond of walking and gets around as much as needed.

"I will stay here as long as I can," he said. "Of course, there will come a time to think about moving. You can count the days until I turn 87."

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